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When an expression becomes fixed: *mä ajattelin että* ‘I thought that’ in spoken Finnish

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Abstract

This chapter concerns the first person past tense form of the verb *ajatella* ‘to think’ as a semi-fixed expression in spoken Finnish. We examine this expression in present-day conversation and in older dialect interviews, focusing on its interactional functions, the types of complements it takes, and its patterns of morphosyntactic fixedness and morphophonetic erosion in our two datasets. We show that the verb *ajatella* is most frequently used in its first person past tense form, *mä ajattelin että* [SG1 + think-PST-1SG + COMP] ‘I thought that’, and as has been shown for ‘think’ verbs in many other languages, it is commonly used to frame stance expressions, but another frequent use in our Finnish data is in prefacing the speaker’s expression of her own plans as well as proposals of joint action. Most commonly, *mä ajattelin että* is followed by clausal complements in our older data, while the complements are more diverse in the newer data, and the expression can also

¹ Authorship is shared jointly. Janica Rauma has been responsible for the consensus analysis and the management of the two datasets. Marja-Liisa Helasvuo and Ritva Laury have done most of the writing.

occur without any complements. We also show that while *mä ajattelin että* ‘I thought that’ occurs in our data in drastically reduced form and shows signs of morphosyntactic fixedness especially in the newer data, it cannot yet be said to have become an epistemic particle.

Keywords

‘think’ verbs, semi-fixed expression, spoken Finnish, stance expression, planning, proposal for joint action, complementation, phonetic reduction, past tense, first person

1 Introduction

The focus of our chapter is the expression *mä ajattelin että*² [SG1 + think-PST-1SG + COMP] ‘I thought that’, the most frequently occurring format for the verb *ajatella* ‘think’ in spoken Finnish, which we examine in two separate corpora, one consisting of present-day conversations, and the other of dialect interviews conducted some 50 years ago. We compare the interactional functions of this expression in the two corpora, the structure of the

² In the text, we refer to the expression in its full form, with the most frequent variant of the personal pronoun in our data. However, as we will show, there are multiple variants speakers use in our data. See section 6.1 for details.

complements that the expression occurs with, and its morphosyntactic fixedness and erosion.

In what follows, we first describe our data and methodology. We then discuss the interactional functions of *mä ajattelin että*. In that section we show that *mä ajattelin että* is used with utterances which express epistemic and evaluative/affective stance, functions that ‘think’ verbs have been shown to have in a number of languages. Furthermore, it can be used to initiate expressions of the content of the speaker’s own thoughts. Especially in the modern conversational data, it is also used in contexts of planning and with proposals for joint action. We then discuss the syntactic makeup of complements of the expression in our data and show that while clausal complements predominate in the older dialect data, in the modern conversational data, the types of complements *mä ajattelin että* takes are more diverse, and it also occurs without any complements. Finally, we will discuss the morphosyntactic fixedness and phonetic erosion of the expression. We show that *mä ajattelin että* is more likely to appear as a fixed expression in the modern conversational data than in the older dialect interview data. Further, the expression is phonetically eroded in a number of ways in our data, the most minimal forms involving the cliticization of both the pronoun and the complementizer to the verb, which lacks both an overt tense marker and person marker, and the verb stem consists of just one syllable, so that the form is simply *maattet*. We conclude that although *mä*

ajattelin että has many characteristics of a fixed expression, it has not yet reached a point where it could be called a particle or even an epistemic fragment in most of its uses. Instead, it seems to be only on its way to becoming one, and is at this point semi-fixed.

2 Data and methodology

Our data consist of altogether 378 uses of variants of the expression *mä ajattelin että* from two distinct databases recorded at two different points in time. The older data come from the Corpus of Finnish Dialects, consisting of interviews conducted by Finnish dialectologists in the 1960s and 70s with elderly speakers from different dialect areas in the country. The resulting corpus contains over 1 million words and is housed at the Syntax Archives at the University of Turku. From these data, we have analyzed 128 uses of the verb *ajatella* in the 1st person singular. The conversational data come from the Arkisyn corpus, a searchable morphosyntactically coded database of Finnish everyday conversations developed by Marja-Liisa Helasvuo and her research group at the University of Turku. The Arkisyn corpus currently contains over 279 000 words. The corpus consists of conversational data collected at the Universities of Helsinki and Turku from the 1990s onwards up to the present day. We have additionally supplemented the conversational corpus with data from the Recording Archives at the University of Turku.

Together the conversational data amount to 248 uses of our target expression.

See Table 1.

Table 1. Number of uses in the two corpora

<i>ajatella</i> in 1st person singular	N
Conversational corpus	248
Dialect corpus	128
Total	376

In the older dialect interviews, the informants were invited to speak freely of their life and old customs; the goal was to get the informant to talk as much as possible, with minimal input from the interviewer. In contrast, the newer conversational data were recorded in naturally occurring situations, and the participants were free to speak as little or as much as the situation called for with no limitation on topics or activities. As can be seen, the two corpora are quite different in nature besides being recorded at different times, and differences between them can be attributed to dialectal and genre differences as well as language change over time.

We use the methodology of Interactional Linguistics, an approach to the study of grammar in interaction that combines insights from discourse functional linguistics, Conversation Analysis, and the sociology of language (Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson 1996; Selting and Couper-Kuhlen 2000; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2001). A central tenet of Interactional

Linguistics is that language is designed to serve interaction between speakers; as Couper-Kuhlen and Selting put it, Interactional Linguistics is interested in “how interactional exigencies shape language structure and use in social interaction” (2018:16). This view of language is very close to the view of language in the theory of emergent grammar. In that theory, grammar is thought to emerge as people interact using language, online (Auer 2005), instead of grammar rules existing as an autonomous system unaffected by language use in the mind of the speaker before they are put to use in actual utterances (the *a priori grammar postulate* vs. *emergent grammar*; Hopper 1988, 2011). In Interactional Linguistics, grammar is viewed as an intricately organized set of ready-made constructions varying in size and degree of abstraction, and closely related to the social actions they are conventionally used to perform in interaction (see e.g. Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson 2005). Crucially, like the formats themselves, the connection between grammatical formats and the actions they are linked with emerges from usage.³ Furthermore, the form of the construction, and the link to particular actions, becomes more ingrained and is strengthened to the degree that it is used in that particular form and in that particular context. As constructions become more routinized, they become more fixed and lose in manipulability and internal structure (see e.g. Bybee 2010). Understanding this process is a

³ Presumably, the constructions and the ways they are used are stored in memory, and repeated use strengthens the connections between formats and their use contexts, so that grammar can be viewed as “the cognitive organization of one’s experience with language (Bybee 2010:8–9)”. However, we do not have direct evidence of how that takes place in memory, whereas we do have direct evidence of how language is used.

challenge to the idea of the paradigm as a set of equally available choices of forms of a certain linguistic item, void of information about contexts of use.

3 Background

It has been shown that in frequent use, complement-taking expressions develop into fixed expressions, becoming “epistemic fragments”, and in that process, lose their ability to take complements (Thompson 2002). In seemingly biclausal combinations involving such fragments or formulaic expressions, the first part, or “the matrix clause”, is not really a clause, but has become a partly formulaic sequence with limited lexical choices, which serves to project upcoming content, and the second part may not be a clause either, but rather “an indeterminate stretch of discourse without a consistent syntactic structure” (Hopper and Thompson 2008:99). Eventually such fixed expressions form pragmatic particles which may occur in a number of syntactic positions with functions ranging from hedging to stance-taking of various kinds. Processes of this type have been described for a number of languages (e.g., Östman 1981, Scheibman 2001, Kärkkäinen 2003, and Brinton 2007 for English; Keevallik 2003, 2010 for Estonian; Laury and Okamoto 2011 for English and Japanese; Imo 2011 for German; Pekarek Doehler 2011 for French; Laury and Helasvuo 2016; Keevallik and Weatherall 2020).

Fixed expressions from ‘think’ verbs are known to specialize in stance taking use crosslinguistically, but they also have a variety of other uses. Thus Endo (2013) has shown that in Mandarin, *wǒ juéde* ‘I think’ is used to mitigate conflict at the beginning of a turn, to distance oneself from one’s own claim in the middle of a turn, and to solicit a response at the end of a turn.

Kärkkäinen has shown that the English *I thought* is used for taking an evaluative or affective stance and as a preface to interjections or tellings; in addition, it is also used to index a change in the speaker’s epistemic stance (Kärkkäinen 2009, 2012). Similarly, Deppermann and Reineke (2017; Frthc.) have shown that first person past tense forms of German *denken* ‘to think’ are most frequently used to retract a discrepant assumption earlier held by a speaker, now proven mistaken, but also to index evaluative or affective stance, to provide intentions or reasons for a prior action, to claim prior knowledge, to index that one is not claiming secure knowledge, and to make an alternative proposal. Deppermann and Reineke also show that *ich dachte* ‘I thought’ can function as a matrix clause to a subordinate clause, but it can also occur before main clauses, interjections, pronouns, and prepositional objects, and can also be used elliptically, so that the content towards which *ich dachte* expresses propositional attitude is not overtly represented after it.

For the Finnish *mä ajattelin että* ‘I thought that’, Haakana (2005, 2007) has shown that what he calls “reported thought” in complaint stories is used to

show how narrators evaluated others' actions and words in the narrated story, as well as to guide the story recipients in evaluating the story. Stevanovic (2013) has shown that in workplace interaction, constructing proposals and suggestions as a thought enables the symmetrical distribution of deontic rights at the beginning of joint decision-making sequences. In what follows, we will show that while *mä ajattelin että* is used to frame expressions of epistemic, evaluative and affective stance in our data, in the modern conversational data it is most frequently used in planning contexts, and in both sets of data, it is not uncommon to find speakers using it to express the content of their own past thoughts, a type of use only seldom found for the German *ich dachte* 'I thought' (Deppermann and Reineke 2017:32) and for the English *I thought* (Kärkkäinen 2012).

4 Interactional functions of *mä ajattelin että*

As noted above, *mä ajattelin että* frames the expression of stance in our data, and it also occurs in contexts where the speaker is expressing the content of her own thought, but in our *modern* conversational data, it was most frequently used in planning contexts. The next most common context was stance-taking. Thirdly, it was used in expressions of one's own thoughts. In what follows, we will first discuss each of these functions (4.1–4.3) and then summarize our findings regarding the functions (4.4).

4.1 Planning and proposing function

The use of *mä ajattelin että* in planning contexts ranges from announcements of what the speaker intends to do in the future to the mitigation of proposals for joint action and other types of plans (cf. Stevanovic 2013; Couper-Kuhlen 2014). Note that even though the verb in this expression is in the past tense, it can be used to project into the future, as happens in (1) which is an example of a planning use, which comes from a multiparty conversation. Four friends are having dinner together and at the same time, looking at and commenting on photographs from Kerttu's recent wedding.

Example 1: Conversation⁴ (Sg346b)

- 1 Kerttu: → .hh *maatteli* *mä tekisi* *semmose*
1SG-think-PST-COMP 1SG make-COND.1SG such-ACC
'I thought I might make like,'
- 2 *mhh (1.1) yhen kansion mis on niinku*
one-ACC binder-ACC REL-INE be.3SG PTC
'one album where there is like,'
- 3 *(0.5) ku me saatii semmone yks kansio⁵ mis on*
because 1PLget-PASS such one binder REL-INE be.3SG
'because we got this one album that has like'

⁴ For each example, we show which corpus (the conversational data or the dialect interview data) each example comes from. The morphological glosses are explained in the Appendix.

⁵ The observant reader may notice that this mention of the album is the (unmarked) nominative while the mention in lines 1–2 is in the accusative case. Although both mentions are objects, the verb in 1–2 is in the first person singular form while the verb in 3 is in the passive form (which is commonly used with first person plural subjects). Passive verbs take their objects in the nominative. We thank Yoshi Ono for pointing out the need for explanation here.

- 4 *#niinku# (0.2) sadalle kuvalle suurin piirtee?*
 PTC hundred-ALL picture-ALL big-PL-INSTR trait-INSTR
 ‘for about a hundred pictures.’
- 5 (0.2)
- 6 (Eeva): *nii.*
 PTC
 ‘ok.’
- 7 Kerttu: → (1.2) *semmone valkone kansio maatteli*
 such white binder 1SG-think-PST-COMP
 ‘like a white album I thought that’
- 8 *mä (.) siihel liimaan sillee niinku (1.0) valitut?*
 1SG DEM-ILL glue-1SG DEM.ADV PTC choose- PTCP-PL
 ‘I’ll like glue like certain ones in it.’

Just prior to this turn, there is a pause in the conversation. The participants, gathered around a table, are engaged in looking through stacks of photographs. Kerttu is humming. Then, in her turn consisting of multiple TCUs, Kerttu starts a new subtopic and tells about her plans for making a wedding album. The first *mä ajattelin että* is in line 1 of the example. It is followed by a clause which functions as its complement, but Kerttu does not finish the relative clause modifying the accusative object NP *semmose yhen kansion* ‘like an album’, but instead starts a parenthetical insertion (Routarinne and Duvallon 2005) taking the form of a *ku* ‘because’ clause in line 3, with *semmone yks kansio* again in object position, now with a full relative clause modifying it. This parenthesis could be motivated by the fact that only a month has elapsed since the wedding, and what Kerttu and her husband have received as presents is still relevant. A bit later in the

conversation, Kerttu also indicates that she is not very interested in making a wedding album to begin with; the mention of the fact that the album was a gift may be offered as an explanation for the activity of making one. One of the coparticipants receives this with the response particle *nii* in line 6. Sorjonen (2001) has shown that in response to informings, *nii(n)* receives the prior turn as beginning something new that is still incomplete. In these contexts, *niin* typically comes after a short pause, as it does here. Kerttu can be seen to give her coparticipants an opportunity to respond, and one of them is here indexing her readiness to hear more about Kerttu's wedding album. Kerttu does continue, and in lines 7–8, she does continue telling about her plan, prefacing it again with *mä ajattelin että*.

In (1), both instances of the expression *mä ajattelin että* are produced in a phonetically reduced form:

mä ajattelin että => maatteliet

The pronominal subject (*m(in)ä*) is merely a nasal *m-* cliticized to the verb, the two first syllables of the verb *ajatella* are merged into one, the 1st person singular marker *-n* is eroded, and the complementizer *että* appears in reduced form as a clitic of the verb, resulting in *maatteliet*. In the examples we present, we have transcribed the *mä ajattelin että* expression closely following its morphophonetic form (see the first line). The morphological

gloss (see the second line) correlates with the actual form used. When discussing the examples, we will not comment on the erosion found in this expression until section 6.

Example (2) comes from a telephone call and contains the use of *mä ajattelin että* framing a proposal for joint action. The participants have exchanged greetings, and Kaaka, the caller, then moves on to a how-are-you sequence (Hakulinen 1993).

Example 2: Conversation (SG113)

- 1 Kaaka: *.mthhh mitäs: sinä tä#nää#*,
what-CLT 2SG today
'what's up with you today.'
- 2 (.)
- 3 Missu: *en mitää erikoista. => tulisik sä käymää.*
NEG-1SG any-PAR special-PAR come-COND-Q 2SG visit-INF-ILL
'nothing special. would you like to come to visit.'
- 4 (1.5)
- 5 Kaaka: → *>khm #maatettü#*, < (0.3) *.mth jos sää*
1SG-think-COMP if 2SG
'I was thinking whether you'
- 6 *lähtisit mun kans, (0.2) vähä aj#e:lee#.*
go-COND-2SG 1SG-GEN with a.little drive-INF-ILL
'might go with me for a little drive.'
- 7 (.)
- 8 Missu: *.hh voisin mä.h*
be.able-COND-1SG 1SG
'yes I could.'

After Kaaka's question about what Missu is up to (l. 1), which can be retroactively analyzed as a preface to a preface (Schegloff 2007:44), Missu responds by saying she is not engaged in anything particular, and invites Kaaka to come visit her. Instead of responding to the invitation, after a noticeable pause, Kaaka makes a counterproposal. Prefacing her turn with a highly reduced version of *mä ajattelin että*, Kaaka asks if Missu would like to go for a ride with her. Both the delay in responding, as well as the dysfluent way Kaaka's turn is produced, with a pause after *maatettä* and another pause before the mention of the activity, *vähä ajelee* 'for a little drive', which is also mitigated with *vähä* 'a little', may be seen as projecting some type of dispreference with the turn. Endo (2010) notes that in Mandarin conversation, the use of a 'think' preface may mitigate a potential disagreement, and function as a 'disagreement preface'. Kaaka has not responded to Missu's invitation, made in line 3, which is dispreferred and amounts to a potential refusal, and thus the situation is somewhat delicate. Kaaka may also be projecting potential refusal of her own counterproposal in lines 5–6. Namely, it turns out later in the conversation (not shown here) that Kaaka is taking a risk, because her turn is formatted as a proposal for joint action (Couper-Kuhlen 2014), but what she is actually doing is making a request; namely, she is hoping she and Missu could go and deliver Kaaka's thank-you notes⁶

⁶ It is not clear from the phone conversation what the thank-you notes are for, but given Kaaka's age at the time of the call, these could be thank-yous for the graduation presents she has received. Kaaka treats the reference to the thank-you notes as something Missu already knows about.

using Missu's family's car. Stevanovic (2013) suggests that "asking conditionals", clauses with verbs in the conditional mood initiated with *jos* 'if', when prefaced with references to the speakers' thoughts (*mä aattelin että* 'I was thinking that'), can be seen as a way to manage problems in joint decision-making, and in general involve some type of delicacy or anticipation of problems. This is certainly the case here.

4.2 Expression of stance

Especially in our older dialect interview data, *mä ajattelin että* is used to preface the expression of stance. Most commonly, it was used in expressions of evaluative or sometimes also affective stance. Consider example (3), recorded in the community of Kisko in southwestern Finland. The speaker is telling about the customs associated with the celebration of Shrovetide, the holiday period which occurs just before Lent, the fast before Easter.

Example 3: Dialect (Kisko)

kum mää muistan ku enne eitiki sano et
 because 1SG remember-1SG as before mom-CLT say.PST.3SG COMP
 'because I remember when in the old days my mother used to say that'

et pit täytymä niinku seittemäs (.) eri nurkas
 COMP must.PST.3SG must.INF like seven-INE different corner-INE
 'that one should eat in seven different corners'

syär sillon (.) laskjasena sit ja.
 eat-INF then Shrove.Tuesday-ESS then and
 'then on Shrove Tuesday and.'

→ *ja mää ajatteli et kui sitä*
 and 1SG think-PST COMP how DEM-PAR
 ‘and I thought that how come’

nii mones nurkas tartte syör sit.
 so many-INE corner-INE need.3SG eat-INF then
 ‘one would need to eat in so many corners.’

Here, the speaker is taking a somewhat critical evaluative stance toward the custom, which she had learned about from her mother, of eating in seven different corners on Shrove Tuesday. The speaker is questioning the need for this.

In our modern conversational data, *mä ajattelin että* was also commonly used to preface the expression of evaluative stance. Consider example (4), in which AL is telling about an encounter with a friend’s mother on a bus. She is portraying the mother in a negative light, as an insensitive and clumsy person.

Example 4: Conversation (C159)

1 AL: *nii mitä muute isojärven mude tuli taas tota noinni,*
 PTC what else LN-GEN mother come-PST.3SG again PTC PTC PTC
 ‘yeah what by the way Isojärvi’s mom came again uh,’

2 *koska- entispäiväm päiväl vai olik se eilem päiväl.*
 when day.before-GEN day-ADE or be-PST-Q DEM yesterday day-ADE
 ‘when- the day before yesterday or was it yesterday,’

3 EL: °*nii*, °
 PTC
 ‘yeah’

- 4 AL: *samas linja-autos.mää istusi sii melko edes niin kuule*
 same-INE bus-INE 1SG sit-PST there fairly in.front PTC PTC
 ‘on the same bus. I was sitting kind of in the front so you know’
- 5 *olisit nähnyt se ilmet ku se paino*
 be-CON-2SG see-PTCP DEM expression-PAR when DEM push.PST.3SG
 ‘you should have seen her expression when she rushed’
- 6 → *>sisäl se meni< maatteli et se kaata ne*
 inside-ALL DEM go-PST 1SG-think-PST-COMP DEM fell.3SG DEM.PL
 ‘inside she went I thought that she’s (going to) knock over those’
- 7 *muut pienemät ihmiset sii edessä katsomatta.*
 other-PL small-COMP-PL people-PLthere front-INE-2SGPX look-INF-ABE
 ‘other smaller persons in front of her without looking’

AL’s stance toward the older woman is indexed in a variety of ways in her narrative. The first noun used to refer to her, *mude*, is a slang term for ‘mother’, somewhat impolite especially when used for someone else’s mother. She then (l. 5) characterizes the woman’s expression as noteworthy, and the verb used for entering, *paino*, perhaps glossable as ‘rushed’, already implicates both speed and heedlessness. This becomes even more clear as AL uses *mä aatteli et* to preface her own evaluation that the woman’s manner of movement and lack of care (*katsomatta* ‘without looking’) put the other passengers, characterized as smaller than the woman herself, at risk of being pushed over and falling down. Thus, from an already negatively stanced informing presented as a fact, with *mä ajattelin että*, AL moves into an even more clearly stanced expression of what she thought might happen. Note that as in examples (1) and (2), *mä ajattelin että* again projects into the future: what follows it is something that is presented as being timed, at least

potentially, after the time of thinking in the context. Tommola (1992:15) has suggested that in some usages the verb *ajatella* is used like a modal verb (auxiliary) and the use of the past tense is related to this modal meaning even though the verb is used to describe an action at the time of speaking. It certainly seems true that in the contexts we study here, past tense seems to have conventionalized for the first person singular use of *ajatella*. There are very few first person uses of *ajatella* in any other tense in our data.⁷

4.3 Expression of speaker's own thoughts

Kärkkäinen (2012) notes that in her data, *I thought* was rarely used to refer to an actual cognitive act in the past. She concludes that “there is not much literal (cognitive) meaning left in the cases of *I thought* in the data” (2012:2199). Deppermann and Reineke (2017) make a similar observation for the German *ich dachte* ‘I thought’. However, in our data, *mä ajattelin että* is used to frame the expression of the speaker's own thoughts; this function accounts for more than one fifth of the uses of this expression in both our data sets. Consider example (5) where two couples are celebrating the start of the Christmas season. They have just toasted the season with *glögi*, a mulled wine holiday drink popular in the Nordic countries, and have exchanged good

⁷ Only 7.3% of the first person singular forms of *ajatella* were in some other tense than past. In the most reduced forms, the tense marker *-i* is not present. Thus the distinction between past and present can be thought of as neutralized in those forms: they are not marked for past tense but they do not look like present tense forms either.

wishes. Mikko then remarks that they have not celebrated together since they vacationed together in Gorgo.

Example 5: Conversation (SG355)

- 1 Mikko: ↓*e:i juhlistuka* *sit* [*vi- ku >viimeks ku Korgolla*,
NEG celebrate-PTCP-CLT then when last-TRA when Gorgo-ALL
'(we) haven't celebrated since last (time) at Gorgo,'
- 2 Jaana: [*onneks sä toit* *tätä*
luckily 2SG bring-PST-3SG DEM-PAR
'good thing you brought this'
- 3 *manteliglögiä*,
almond.glög-PAR
'almond glög,'
- 4 *kyl tää maistuu mante[lille*,
PTC DEM taste-3SG almond-ALL
'this really has an almond taste'
- 5 Mirja: [*n*̥*i*,
PTC
'yeah'
- 6 Jaska: [*↑ei okka*,↓
NEG be.CONNEG-CLT
'no (we) haven't'
- 7 Mikko: *m*[*m*,
- 8 Jaana: [*>ihana*,<
wonderful
'wonderful'
- 9 Mirja: [*ai kun on hyvää*,
PTC as be.3SG good-PAR
'oh how tasty,'
- 10 Jaana: [*>mitäh?*,< ((Looks at Jaska))
what
'what'

- 11 Mikko: → ↓*maatt*↑*et* *o juhlistukka* *viime*
 1SG-think-PST COMP be celebrate-PTCP-CLT last
 ‘I was thinking we haven’t celebrated last’
- 12 >*ku viimeks Korgolla.*
 when last-TRA Gorgo-ADE
 ‘since last time at Gorgo’
- 13 Jaana: [↑*nii-i*,↑]
 PTC
 ‘yeah,’
- 14 Mikko: [*Korgossa*,]
 Gorgo-INE
 ‘in Gorgo’
- 15 Jaana: *ja ne kuvat on vieläki kehittämättä kun,*
 and DEM.PL photo-PL be.3SG still-CLT develop-INF-ABE when
 ‘and the pictures have still not been developed’
- 16 Jaana: *negatiivit [on tallella*
 negative-PL be.3SG in.safe.keeping
 ‘I know where the negatives are’
- 17 Mikko: [*pa- paljoks siitä on aikaa,*
 much-Q-CLT DEM-ELA be.3SG time-PAR
 ‘how long has it been,’
- 18 Jaana: *Edelleen£, mää vien heti .nf kum mää,*
 still 1SG take-1SG immediately when 1SG
 ‘still, I’ll take (them) as soon as I’
- 19 *.nff tänä aamuna laitan,*
 DEM-ESS morning-ESS put-1SG
 ‘I’ll get (them) this morning,’

In overlap with Mikko’s turn (l. 1), Jaana evaluates positively the almond-flavored glög that Mirja, one of the guests, has brought (l. 2–4). In overlap with Mirja’s response particle, Jaska responds to Mikko’s turn (l. 6). This is an agreeing response, since it is negatively formatted just like Mikko’s turn.

Jaska responds to Mikko, and Mirja and Jaana continue evaluating the drink. However, Jaana then (l. 10) issues an open class repair initiator, presumably addressed to Jaska. She may not have heard what he said in his last turn (l. 6), or else she is not able to interpret his response, possibly because she has not heard what Mikko had said, since she had overlapped with his earlier turn (l. 1). Mikko repeats his earlier turn (l. 11), now prefaced with *mä ajattelin että*. Here, Mikko is formulating his observation that they had not celebrated together since their shared vacation as his thought. Jaana then picks up the general topic brought up by Mikko and laments not having yet developed the photographs from the vacation.

4.4 Interim summary

Table 2 gives a quantitative summary of the functions in the two corpora studied.

Table 2. Functions of *mä ajattelin että* in the two corpora

Function	Conversation		Dialect interview	
	N	%	N	%
Planning	98	39.52	33	25.78
Stance:epistemic	33	13.31	21	16.41
Stance:evaluative/affective	57	22.98	48	37.50
Expressing one's own thoughts	54	21.77	26	20.31
Unclear	6	2.42	0	0.00
Total	248	100.00	128	100.00

As can be seen, in the conversational data, the planning function was the most common one, at nearly 40% of all uses. It was somewhat less common in the dialect interview data, although even there, just over one quarter of the uses had to do with planning. In those data, the expression of stance was the most common use, especially the expression of evaluative or affective stance. This is not surprising, since narration of events in the past was common in the dialect interview data, and narratives are known to involve evaluation (Labov 1972). In research on other languages, the use of ‘think’ verbs to frame expressions of planning has not been found to be a prominent function of this verb (cf. e.g. Kärkkäinen 2012, Deppermann and Reineke 2017).

The more frequent use of *mä ajattelin että* in planning contexts in our newer, conversational data may reflect a change in the use of this expression, but it may also be affected by the different types of data we are dealing with. Plans, and even less, proposals for joint action, which we found in our conversational data, may not occur as frequently in dialect interviews as they do in everyday conversation. However, in both sets of data, *mä ajattelin että* was being used to express the speaker’s own thoughts, differently from the English and German data examined by, respectively, Kärkkäinen (2012:2199) and Deppermann and Reineke (2017:32), who both note that in their data, it was used that way only rarely. In our Finnish data, *mä ajattelin että* is used to express of one’s own thoughts with approximately the same frequency in both datasets.

5 Complementation

As noted above, frequently used complement-taking expressions in the languages of the world, such as expressions from ‘think’ verbs, become fixed expressions and in such uses, lose their ability to take complements. They become what Thompson (2002) calls ‘epistemic fragments’, losing the ability to function as main clauses, and eventually develop into particles which can occur in a number of syntactic positions. We suggest that *mä ajattelin että* has not yet reached the point where it could be called an epistemic fragment, although in some of its uses, it approaches that status. It is fairly fixed in form, restricted in lexical choice, morphologically reduced, and serves to project upcoming content rather than functioning as a proper main clause.

How, then, do the complements differ in our two data sets, collected at different times and representing two different genres of spoken Finnish? As can be seen in Table 3, in our modern conversational data, the range of complement types is considerably more diverse than in our older dialect data. This may, of course, be a genre effect, but it is also possible that this reflects a diachronic change.

Table 3. Complements in the two corpora.

Complement	Conversation		Dialect interview	
	N	%	N	%
Clausal	182	73.39	118	92.19
Infinitival	18	7.26	1	0.78
Pronoun + clause	5	2.02	0	0.00
Nominal	13	5.24	1	0.78
Other	6	2.42	4	3.13
No complement	24	9.68	0	0.00
Unclear	0	0.00	4	3.13
Total	248	100.00	128	100.00

As can be seen from Table 3, the overwhelming majority of *mä ajattelin että* expressions, more than 90%, had clausal complements in the dialect data. Other complement types were rather rare: of 128 uses, only ten involved complements that were not clausal. Notably, every use of *mä ajattelin että* was followed by a complement of some type. Consider example (6).

Example 6: Dialect (Kalanti)

mä ajatteli et mä menenkin toho noi .
1SG think-PST.1SG COMP 1SG go-1SG-CLT DEM-ILL DEM.PL-INSTR
'I thought that I will go right there.'

This is a planning context set in past tense; the speaker is formulating his own thought in the past, and the clause that follows is in the present tense. Thus the complement is clausal, and functions like a direct quote (see Haakana 2005 on "reported thought"). Unlike English, in Finnish, reporting phrases can be linked to direct quotes with a complementizer, as is done here.

However, note that in our coding, only the immediately following unit was considered in determining complement type. That is, extended stretches of discourse following the *mä ajattelin että* expression were also coded as clausal complements if the first syntactic construction that followed was clausal. Example (7) is a case in point. The speaker is telling about his trip to a neighboring village.

Example 7: Dialect (Säkylä)

- 1 A: *lährin- aamust Säkylää menemää*
 go-PST-1SG morning-ELA Säkylä-ILL go-INF-ILL
 ‘I started to go to Säkylä in the morning’

- 2 *ja jää oli aika kehnoo ja (.)*
 and ice be-PST quite poor and
 ‘and the ice was pretty poor and’

- 3 → *mut mä aatteli mää käyn täsä aamukorvanteelk*
 but 1SG think-pst.1SG 1SG go-1SG this-INE morning.hour-ADE
 ‘but I thought I will go at this early hour’

- 4 *ko yälp pakanen- oli ni*
 as night-ADE frost was PTC
 ‘because it had frozen at night so,’

- 5 *(.) ja tulem pian takasin siält- et*
 and come-1SG soon back DEM-ABL COMP
 ‘and I will come right back from there so’

- 6 *(.) ni mää pääse.*
 PTC 1SG get.1SG
 ‘so I can get back.’

Note that here, the *mä ajattelin että* expression is immediately followed by a clausal complement, *mää käyn täsä aamukorvanteelk*, which is in the present tense, and thus formatted as the speaker’s thought or plan at a moment in the

past. The next causal adverbial *ko* ‘because’ clause (l. 4), however, is in the past tense, as it describes the weather conditions prior to the time of the plan, giving the cause of the timing of the trip. The clause ends with the particle *ni* ‘so’, but it is not followed by a consequent, as one would expect from the use of this particle, but rather the coordinating conjunction *ja* ‘and’ , followed by two clauses, one reflecting the plan (l. 5), also in present tense, ending with a particle use *et* ‘so (that)’ and then a consequent clause initiated by the particle *ni* ‘so’ (l. 6). The connection between the causal clause in line 4 and the clause in line 5 is somewhat ambiguous syntactically, as is the connection between the clause in line 5 and the one in line 6. Thus we may consider what follows *mä ajattelin että* here “an indeterminate stretch of discourse” discussed by Hopper and Thompson (2008), rather than a proper clausal complement. In general, multiple embedding is rather rare in ordinary spoken conversation (see, e.g. Laury and Ono 2010). Here we could analyze *mä aatteli* as a projector phrase (e.g. Günthner 2011) marking the following as the speaker’s plan formulated as his internal thought (cf. Haakana 2005, 2007) rather than a complement-taking construction. Note also that here, *mä ajattelin* is not followed by the complementizer *että*. We will return to that issue a bit later.

In the modern conversational data, the types of complements are quite a bit more diverse than in the older dialect data. Clausal complements form the largest group at 73% in these data as well, but there are quite a few cases with

no complement at all (10%). These tend to be responsive turns, or cases where the turn is left incomplete due to another speaker coming in, or even overlapped talk, as commonly occurs in everyday conversation, but not so commonly in interviews, or other disruptions of the speaker's plan, as in (8), where there is an intervening parenthetical. The speaker is telling about falling on slippery ice.

Example 8: Conversation (SG108)

- 1 A: → *kyl mäki kaadui ku: tota: mä viel ajatteli*
 PTC 1SG-CLT fall-PST-1SG PTC PTC 1SG even think-PST.1SG
 'I also fell because/when I was even thinking'
- 2 *just sillon ku .hh mä menin sinne poliisiasemalle*
 right then when 1SG go-1SG DEM.ADV police.station-ALL
 'right when I went to the police station'
- 3 *↑h(h)ak(h)een niitä rahoja niin,*
 fetch-INF-ILL DEM.PL-PAR money-PL-PAR PTC
 'to get the money,'
- 4 *.hh mun edellä kaatu yks nainen ku oli*
 1SG-GEN in.front fall-PST.3SG one woman because be-PST.3SG
 'some woman fell right in front of me'
- 5 *iha (0.5) ↑iha vettä siellä. (0.5) siinä jään päällä=*
 quite quite water-PAR DEM-ADV DEM.INE ice-GEN POSTP
 'because there was actually water there. On top of the ice'
- 6 K: =*nii.*=
 PTC
 'right.'
- 7 A: → =*maattet voiku mä en kaatuis*
 1SG-think-COMP PTC-PTC 1SG NEG-1SG fall-COND-CONNEG
 'I thought that oh, (I sure hope) I won't fall.'

The clause in line 2, coming after *mä ajattelin että* in line 1, would at first sight seem to be a complement clause expressing the timing of the thinking, but in fact it is best analyzed as an temporal adverbial clause of the *niin*-clause in line 3. Thus ‘right when I went to the police station to get the money so some woman fell right in front of me because there was actually water there. On top of the ice.’ (l. 2–5) actually form a parenthesis, expressing the background for A’s thinking. After a *niin*-response from K, showing that she has understood A’s turn so far, and expects it to continue (Sorjonen 2001), A reprises her narrative and after a repeat of *mä ajattelin että* (l. 7) comes a clausal complement consisting of reported thought.

In many cases, the talk following *mä ajattelin että* in our modern data, just like in our older, dialect data (as shown in example 4) consists of a series of loosely linked clause-sized utterances (Hopper and Thompson 2008; cf. Auer 1992 “the neverending sentence”) rather than a syntactic clausal complement of *mä ajattelin että*. In other cases, as in example (2), the clause following *mä ajattelin että* is not easily analyzable as its complement for other reasons. We repeat that part of the example as example (9).

Example 9: Conversation (lines 5–8 of example 2, repeated)

5 K: → >khm #*maatettü*#, < (0.3) .mth
 1SG-think-COMP
 ‘I was thinking,’

Preface

6 *jos sää lähtisit mun kans, (0.2) vähä aj#e:lee* **Request**
 if 2SG go-COND-2SG 1SG-GEN with a.little drive.INF-ILL
 ‘if you would go with me for a little drive’

7 (.)

8 M: *hh voisin mä.h* **Receipt**
 be.able-COND-1SG SG
 ‘yes I could.’

As noted in the analysis of example (2), what follows *mä ajattelin että* is an independent *jos* ‘if’ conditional clause. Such *jos* clauses occur frequently in spoken Finnish as directives without any main clauses (Laury 2012), and as shown by Lindström, Lindholm and Laury (2016), such main-clause-less conditional clauses are routinely prefaced by, for example pre-announcements or formulaic utterances such as shown here, in both Finnish and Swedish conversational data. Note that *jos*-initial clauses such as the one in Kaaka’s turn (l. 5–6) are not easily analyzable as clausal complements of a *mä ajattelin että* main clause (see also Laury 2012:220). Semantically, they cannot be construed as being in any way a condition of the speaker’s thinking, and they are not followed by a main clause to which the *jos*-clause could be subordinated. Instead, they are followed by the recipient’s receipt, either an acceptance or denial of the directive. Here, Missu accepts the directive, here, a request.

It is likely that in (9), *jos* is not a proper subordinator, but rather a particle projecting a directive. In cases like this, *mä ajattelin että* seems to have

already evolved into an epistemic fragment or a projector phrase (Aijmer 2007, Günthner 2011, Pekarek Doehler 2011). It is noteworthy that in this example, the expression is also in its most reduced form.

Mä ajattelin että also occurs with infinitival and noun phrase complements especially in our conversational data. In example (10), the complement is a nominal one.

Example 10: Conversation (SG112)

Missu: *kato majattelinki sitä*
PTC 1SG -think-PST-1SG-CLT DEM-PAR
'see I thought about that'

mutta ku se on se paku
but because DEM be.3SG DEM van
'but because there is that van'

ja teitä oli jo kolme siäläh
and 2PL-PAR be-PST-3SG already three DEM.ADV
'and there were already the three of you there.'

The complement here is a demonstrative *sitä* in the partitive case. Since the complement is a nominal one, there is no complementizer. This is also the case with infinitival complements, such as the one in (11).

Example 11: Conversation (SG124)

1 Jani: *maatteli(n) heti soittaa sulle ja kysyä että,*
1SG-think-PST-1SG immediately call-INF 2SG-ALL and ask-INF COMP
'I thought (I would) call you immediately and ask'

2 #n# *että*, (.) >*että* *sä* *voisit* *varmaa* *e:sitellä*<
 COMP COMP 2SG can-COND-2SG certainly introduce
 ‘whether you could perhaps introduce (me)’

Jani is asking his addressee to introduce him to a member of a popular band that the co-participant knows. He frames his request as a thought (Stevanovic 2013) with *maatteli(n)* which receives two infinitival complements, *soittaa* ‘call’ and *kysyä* ‘ask’. The latter one has a clausal complement of its own (line 2).

It has been observed cross-linguistically that for those complement-taking constructions which are no longer used as proper main clauses, but become evidential and epistemic phrases, adverbials or particles, complementizer use is reduced or disappears (e.g. Thompson and Mulac 1991a, b and Kärkkäinen 2003 for English; Keevalik 2003 for Estonian). This does not seem to be the case for the Finnish *mä ajattelin että* at least if one compares the older, dialect interview data and the newer, conversational data. Consider Table 4.

Table 4. Complementizers in clausal complements in the two corpora

Complementizer	Conversation		Dialect interview	
	N	%	N	%
<i>että</i>	159	87.36	75	63.56
Other conjunction	2	1.10	12	10.17
Question word/clitic	2	1.10	10	8.47
No complementizer	17	9.34	21	17.80
Unclear	2	1.10	0	0.00
Total	182	100.00	118	100.00

Table 4 shows that the complementizer *että* is used in the newer, conversational data with greater frequency, in 87% of the uses of *mä ajattelin* *että*, compared to the older, dialect data, where it was used only 64% of the time. The use of different complementizers is more diverse in the older, dialect data, where, together with *että*, other conjunctions and question words or clitics are used as complementizers with greater frequency than in the newer, conversational data. It seems that in the process of becoming more fixed, the expression has become crystallized in a form where the complementizer *että* is included in the expression. Prosodically, complementizers, like other conjunctions, come at the end of the main clause rather than the beginning of the subordinate clause that follows, and in patterns of erosion, it is very common for the complementizer to cliticize to the verb. We will next discuss the patterns of erosion found in the data.

6 Fixedness

In this section, we will address the issue of fixedness of the *mä ajattelin* *että* expression in our data. We will first discuss its patterns of erosion, and then we will examine the data using the methodology of consensus analysis in order to show how similar the sequences of elements found in the data are to each other.

6.1 Erosion

The literature on fixed expressions involving cognitive verbs shows that as these expressions become increasingly formulaic, they show a considerable amount of erosion (cf. e.g. Scheibman and Bybee 1999, Scheibman 2000, Kärkkäinen 2003, Helasvuoto 2014, Keevallik 2016). This is true of *mä ajattelin että* also. So far, our discussion has not focused on the use of the actual morphophonetic form that this expression takes in the individual examples. In the examples so far, however, we have given a close transcription of the actual form in the first line. The examples show that the expression takes various forms. The same speaker may use the expression differently even in the same sequence, as example (8) shows. Both the older dialect data and the modern conversational data show variation in the morphophonetic form of this expression.

We will now discuss this variation. We are limiting our attention here to the conversational data in order to be able to present an in-depth analysis. The dialect data provide additional issues which we are not able to address here: for one thing, there is the question of the form the reduced versions have evolved from in each dialect⁸. The conversational data have been analyzed carefully case by case. For carrying out the analysis presented here, sound

⁸ We thank Maria Vilkkuna for her insightful and apt comment on this issue regarding our dialect data.

clips were prepared of all instances in the data. These clips were then analyzed for several features of reduction based on both auditory and acoustic analysis using the Praat software (Boersma and Weenink 2018). The features included cliticization of the pronominal subject, fusion of the first and second syllable of the verb, reduction of the medial [l] in the verb, loss of past tense suffix *-i-*, loss of person *-n*, and reduction of the complementizer *et(tä)* to a clitic of the verb. If all of these features are present, the *mä ajattelin että* expression is produced as *maattet*.

Some cases in the data show very little erosion. Consider example (12).

Example 12: Conversation (SG120)

Oona: *mie ajattelin et se saattais olla.*
 1SG think-PST-1SG COMPDEM may-COND-3SG be-INF
 ‘I thought that it could be (so).’

In (12), the pronominal subject is expressed as an independent pronoun, and the verb *ajattelin* appears in its full form with the past tense marker and the person marker. The only item that shows some reduction is the complementizer *et* which occurs in a one-syllable form instead of the full two-syllable form *että*. However, (12) is quite exceptional: there are only two cases (out of 248) in the conversational data which do not show much erosion. In the vast majority of cases, there is considerable reduction. In Table 5 we present a quantitative analysis of the reduction in the data. In the

leftmost column, we list the parameters we have used in the coding of the data.

Table 5. Type of reduction in the conversational data.

Type of reduction	Conversation	
	N	%
loss of person marker	201	81.05
fusion of 1 st and 2 nd syllable of the verb	193	77.82
cliticized pronominal subject	162	65.32
reduction of complementizer	136	54.84
loss of past tense marker	117	47.18
reduction of <i>-l-</i> in the verb	92	37.10
Total number of cases	248	100.00

Table 5 shows that the most common type of reduction in the data is loss of person marker, as 81% of the cases show this. The fusion of the first and second syllable of the verb (*aja-* => *aa-*) is also common in the data (78%), as is the cliticization of the pronominal subject (*mä ajattelin* => *maattelin*, 65%).

We found quite a few different, overlapping patterns of erosion. Examples (13) and (14) are only a sampling. In (13), the first two syllables of the verb are fused (*ajat-* => *aat*), the person marker (*-n*) is not present, and the complementizer is cliticized to the verb and consists of just one syllable.

Example 13: Conversation (SG151) *mä ajattelin että* → [miea:t:eliet]

Susa: *e he itseasias* ↓*ajatellu*
NEG as.a.matter.of.fact think-CONNEG
'In fact (I haven't) thought'

↑*mie aatteliet*, (.) *pitää* *£keksii* *sit(h)£ hh.*
1SG think-PST-COMP must.3SG invent-INF then
'I thought that (.) (I) will have to think of something then.'

Figure 1 gives a spectrogram analysis of the expression.⁹ The spectrogram shows that the two first syllables of the verb are merged into one, with no [j] between the syllables. There is no trace of a person marker on the verb. Instead, the complementizer *et* is attached to the verb.

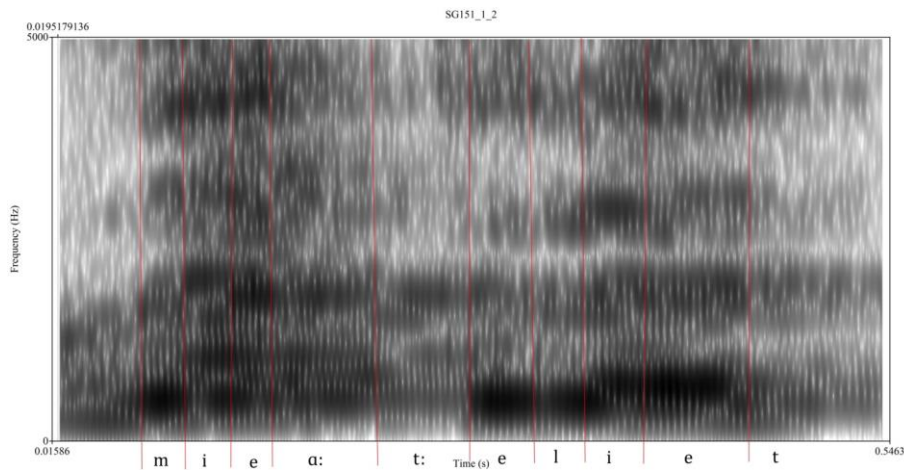


Figure 1. Spectrogram of *mieaatteliet* (example 13).

Example (14) shows the maximal degree of erosion found in our data, where the personal pronoun is cliticized to the verb, the first two syllables of the verb are fused, the medial [l] is not there, there is no past tense marker or

⁹ We thank Elisa Reunanen for producing the spectrogram analyses.

person marker on the verb, and the complementizer is cliticized, and consists of only one syllable.

Example 14: Conversation (D113) *mä ajattelin että* → [mæ:t:et]

Mirva: *se oli joku Tommi, ei mitää hajuu.*
DEM be-PST.3SG some FN NEG.3SG any-PAR smell-PAR
'it was some Tommi, (I have) no idea'

Jatta: *no ei se sit varmaa ku maattet*
PTC NEG.3SG DEM then probably because 1SG-think-COMP 'well
'probably not then because I was thinking'

mum miälest mun rippipappi oli Tommi
1SG-GEN mind-ELA1 SG-GEN confirmation.minister be-PST.3SG FN
'that my confirmation minister was Tommi'

Figure 2 gives a spectrogram of the expression *maattet* in (14). The spectrogram shows that the pronoun is cliticized to the verb, and the first two syllables of the verb are fused. The medial syllable with [l] and the past tense marker is lost, and so is the person marker. The complementizer is cliticized to the base form of the verb.

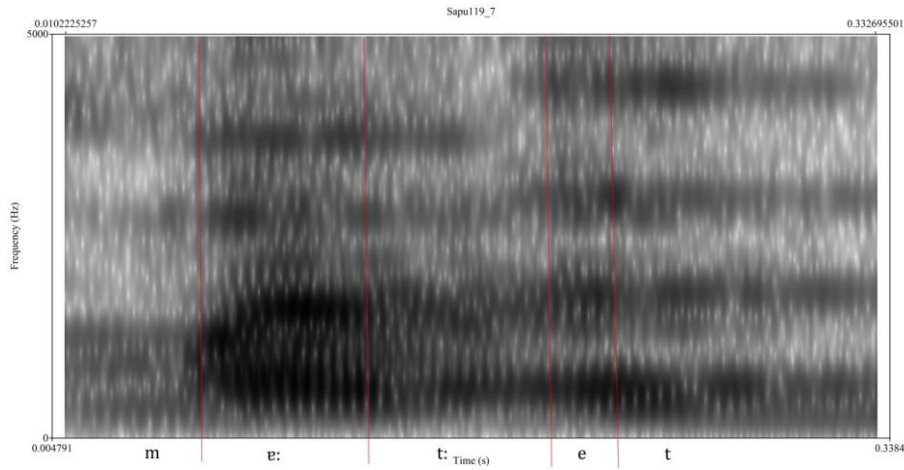


Figure 2. Spectrogram of *maattet* (example 14).

Interestingly, the most common pattern found in the data is one that shows the most reduction (exemplified in example 14 and figure 2): there were 41 cases like this in the data (16.5%). The least reduced pattern (exemplified in example 12) occurred only twice (0.8% of the instances). We will discuss these findings more closely in the next section where we explore the fixedness of the *mä ajattelin että* expression.

6.2. Comparison of fixedness with a consensus analysis

Finally, how fixed is the *mä ajattelin että* expression in our data? We have shown above that there is a great deal of variation in its use in both of the data sets we have studied. To find out if there is some variant or variants which are more frequent than others we have applied consensus analysis to the data. The term consensus analysis refers here to the method we use for

searching and illustrating the most typical variant(s) of the *mä ajattelin että* expression. The method originates in comparative sequence analysis broadly used in bioinformatics. The analysis is essential *inter alia* in reconstructing the evolutionary histories of different species: it is used to find similarities between DNAs of different species by aligning comparable DNA sequences. The similarities can be calculated and shown as a consensus sequence. (See, e.g. Hardison 2003.) In our study, the consensus analysis involves the comparison of features found in the data with the goal of showing which sequences of features best represent the data. In other words, we might ask to what extent the sequences in the data are similar to each other.¹⁰

Consider Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 presents a consensus analysis of the *mä ajattelin että* expressions in the older data. It compares all uses of the first person singular forms of *ajatella*, and shows the proportion of each feature relevant to our focus expression in the whole dialect corpus.

¹⁰ We are grateful to Ida Andersson for preparing and analyzing the data for the consensus analysis.

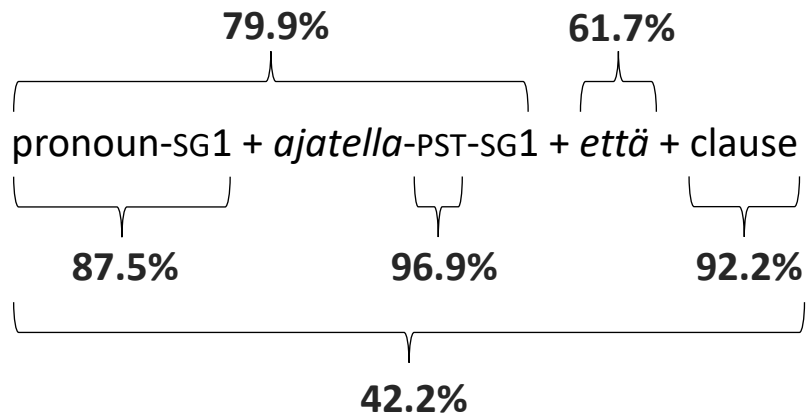


Figure 3. First person singular *ajatella* in the older, dialect data.

Figure 3 shows that of all the first person singular uses of the verb *ajatella* in our older data, 96.9% were in the past tense, 87.5% had a pronominal subject, 61.7% had a complementizer *että*, and 92.2% were followed by a clausal complement. Altogether, this sequence of features represented 42.2% of the first person singular uses of *ajatella* in the data set.

It is also noteworthy that all occurrences of the verb *ajatella* in the older data set are in the affirmative. Furthermore, in the vast majority of cases (80%) the pronominal subject immediately precedes the finite verb.

Now compare this to a consensus analysis of first person singular uses of the verb *ajatella* in our modern conversational data shown in Figure 4.

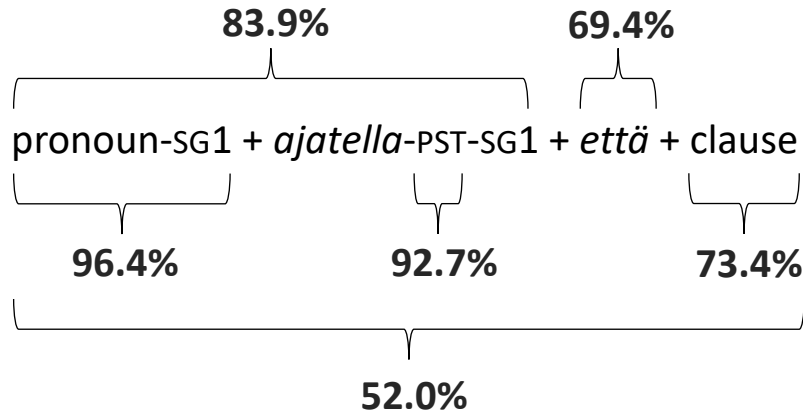


Figure 4. First person singular *ajatella* in the modern conversational data.

Comparing the first person singular uses of *ajatella* in the older dialect data to its uses in the modern conversational data, we can see that the past tense use is slightly more common at 96.9% in the older data compared to 92.7% in the newer data. It is interesting to compare these percentages to the frequency of use of the past tense in general in the two corpora: a search in the Arkisyn corpus reveals that only 26% of all predicates are in the past tense, while in the dialect corpus, past tense is much more commonly used, as 60% of all predicates are in the past tense.¹¹ Thus, for *ajatella*, there is a very clear preference for the use of past tense, and this skewing is especially strong in the conversational data. The first person pronoun was more commonly present in the conversational data at 96.4% compared to 87.5% in the older data. Likewise, the complementizer *että* was present in 69.4% of the uses in the newer, conversational data, while in the older, dialect data, it was present

¹¹ Searches carried out on March 16, 2018 in the dialect corpus (LAX version) and in the Arkisyn corpus.

in 61.7% of the cases. As the results for *mä ajattelin että* reported earlier in the chapter might lead us to expect, clausal complements of *ajatella* were more common in the older data (92.2% vs. 73.4% in the newer, conversational data). Most importantly, the sequence of the expression we have been focusing on in this chapter, the first person pronoun followed by a first person singular past tense form of the verb *ajatella*, followed by the complementizer *että* and a clausal complement, is much more common in the newer data, representing 52.0% of all the uses of the verb *ajatella* in the first person singular compared to 42.2% in the older, dialect data, even given the lower proportion of clausal complements in the newer data.

We also applied consensus analysis to study erosion found in the data. Table 6 presents the consensus analysis of the ten most common patterns in the data. In the table, the feature “reduced complementizer” was not applicable to cases where there either was no complement or the complement was not clausal but instead, nominal or infinitival. The column for “instance from our data” gives an instance found in the data representing the features of erosion.

Table 6. Consensus analysis of features of erosion in the conversational data.

	Sequence of features						Instance from our data	N	%
	cliticized pronoun	1 st and 2 nd syllable merged	reduction of -l-	loss of past tense marker	loss of person marker	reduced complementizer			
1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	<i>maattet</i>	41	16.53
2	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	<i>mä aattet</i>	20	8.06
3	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	<i>maatteli</i>	18	7.26
4	yes	yes	no	no	yes	n/a	<i>maatteli</i>	15	6.05
5	yes	yes	no	no	no	n/a	<i>maattelin</i>	8	3.23
6	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	<i>maattelet</i>	8	3.23
7	no	yes	no	no	yes	n/a	<i>mä aatteli</i>	7	2.82
8	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	<i>majattet</i>	7	2.82
9	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	<i>mä ajattet</i>	5	2.02
10	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	<i>maatteli että</i>	5	2.02

Table 6 shows that the sequence exhibiting the most erosion was by far the most common one in the conversational data: almost 17% of the data represented a sequence of features where the pronoun was cliticized to the verb, the first and second syllable of the verb were fused, the medial [l] was eroded, and the past tense and the person marker were lost. Also the complementizer was reduced to a mere clitic to the verb.

In sum, based on the consensus analysis of our data, we can say that the sequence *mä ajattelin että* is more fixed in our newer, conversational data (cf. Figure 4) than it is in the older, dialect data (cf. Figure 3). By “more fixed” we mean that compared to the older data, an even larger percentage of the

newer data followed the pattern represented in Figure 4. The morphophonetic form it takes is also more fixed, as Table 6 shows.

7 Conclusions

We have discussed the use of the verb *ajatella* ‘think’ in Finnish. As is common for cognitive verbs in general (see e.g. Helasvuo 2014, Helasvuo and Kyröläinen 2016), *ajatella* is overwhelmingly used in the 1st person singular form. Furthermore, *ajatella* shows a strong preference for past tense use. We have focused on the formulaic patterns that emerge from the data, especially the expression *mä ajattelin että* [SG1PRO think-PST-1SG COMP] comparing data from two different corpora: older data from the Corpus of Finnish dialects which contains dialect interviews recorded in the 1960s and 1970s with speakers who were then already in their 70s or 80s, and modern conversational data from the Arkisyn corpus, where the age range of the speakers is more varied. We have explored its interactional functions and syntactic behavior. We have also examined formulaicity and fixedness both in terms of morphosyntactic and morphophonetic features of this expression.

As has been shown for ‘think’ verbs in other languages (e.g. Kärkkäinen 2003, 2012; Deppermann and Reineke 2017), stance taking functions were common for *mä ajattelin että* in both sets of data (cf. examples 3 and 4). In

the conversational data, the most frequent context for *mä ajattelin että* was planning: *mä ajattelin että* was used to frame an expression of plans for future action as in examples (1) and (2). Interestingly, even though a past tense form of *ajatella* was used, the examples were often quite ambiguous whether the actual thinking had occurred prior to the time of speaking or was concurrent with it. Thus, the distinction between present and past tense could be seen as neutralized here, as it is frequently neutralized in the form itself.

Both Kärkkäinen (2012), who has studied the English *I thought* expression and Deppermann and Reineke (2017), who have studied the German equivalent *ich dachte* ‘I thought’ note that these expressions were rarely used to express the speaker’s own thoughts. In contrast to these findings, *mä ajattelin että* was used in expressing the content of the speaker’s thoughts in both of our data sets. On the basis of our analysis we can conclude that our data do not support an assumption that when *mä ajattelin että* has become a fixed expression, it has somehow lost its literal meaning (cf. Kärkkäinen 2012:2199 on the use of the English *I thought* as a fixed epistemic phrase)¹². The Finnish data show instead that stance taking has been central in the meaning potential of *mä ajattelin että* already in the older data, on a par with

¹² As discussed earlier in the chapter, Kärkkäinen (2012:2199, fn) notes that “there is not much literal (cognitive) meaning left in the cases of *I thought* in the data”. She explicitly notes, however, that this is her impression, and suggests that establishing just how much literal meaning is left in the routinized cases would require a study of its own. Note that the use of the term ‘is left’ tends to encode an assumption that the literal meaning has been there at an earlier stage but has then been lost to a great deal.

the function of referring to one's own thoughts. We do not find support in our data for an assumption that expressing one's own thoughts would be more basic or original meaning of *mä ajattelin että*, since we do not have even older data where it would be used in that fashion exclusively or even more frequently.

Our analysis shows that in the older dialect interview data *mä ajattelin että* was most often accompanied with clausal complements: over 92% of *mä ajattelin että* expressions had clausal complements. In the modern conversational data, patterns of complementation were more varied: clausal complements did dominate here too (73% of complements were clausal), but interestingly, there were quite a few cases where there was no complement at all (almost 10%). In the literature on complementation, it has been noted that with frequent use, complement-taking predicates, such as 'think' verbs, form fixed expressions and lose their ability to take complements (e.g. Thompson 2002, Tao 2003, Helasvuoto 2014, Laury and Helasvuoto 2016). In this process, they may become "epistemic fragments" (Thompson 2002) which no longer function as main clauses and eventually become particles. Our data show that *mä ajattelin että* cannot yet be described as an epistemic particle, but some of its uses come close: they have a fixed form, which is morphophonetically reduced, and they serve to frame upcoming content rather than functioning as a proper main clause.

Comparison of the two datasets shows that the use of *ajatella* ‘think’ is more fixed in the modern conversational data than it is in the older dialect interview data (see Figures 3 and 4). It has been suggested in the literature that with frequent use, fixed expressions become not only grammatically reduced but also phonetically eroded (cf. e.g. Scheibman 2000, Keevallik 2003, 2016 on fixed expressions with ‘know’ verbs, Kärkkäinen 2003 on the English *think*, Helasvuo 2014 on fixed expressions with cognitive verbs in Finnish, Bybee 2010:Ch. 3). To investigate phonetic reduction of *mä ajattelin että*, we carried out a careful case-by-case auditory and acoustic analysis of the conversational dataset. It turned out that cases with no reduction at all were rare (only 2 out of 248). A consensus analysis of the data showed that the pattern with the most erosion was the most frequent, with *maattet* being the most frequent one (see Table 6).

Data sources

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Appendix: Transcription and glossing symbols

Transcription symbols

.	falling intonation
,	level intonation
?	rising intonation
↑	step up in pitch
↓	step down in pitch
spe <u>a</u> k	emphasis
>spea<	faster pace than in the surrounding talk
<spea>	slower pace than in the surrounding talk
°spea°	quiet talk
sp-	word cut off
spea:k	lengthening of a sound
#speak#	creaky voice
£speak£	smiley voice
.h	audible inhalation
h	audible exhalation
.speak	word spoken during inhalation
[beginning of overlap
]	end of overlap
=	latching of units
(.)	micropause (less than 0.2 seconds)
(0.6)	pause length in tenth of a second
=>	target line
boldface	focused item in the transcript

Symbols in the translation line

(item)	item that is not expressed in the original language but that belongs grammatically to the English equivalent
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Glossing symbols

Case markers

ACC	accusative
ABE	abessive (‘without’)
ADE	adessive (‘at, on’)

ALL	allative ('to')
ELA	elative ('out of')
GEN	genitive (possession)
ILL	illative ('into')
INE	inessive ('in')
PAR	partitive (partitiveness)
TRA	translative ('to', 'becoming')
INSTR	instructive

Verbal morphemes

1SG	1 st person singular ('I') (also 1 st person singular pronoun)
2SG	2 nd person singular ('you')
3SG	3 rd person singular ('she', 'he')
1PL	1 st person plural ('we')
COND	conditional
CONNEG	connegative
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitive
NEG	negation verb
PASS	passive
PTCP	participle
PST	past tense

Other abbreviations

ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
CLT	clitic
COMP	complementizer
DEM	demonstrative
FN	first name
LN	last name
PL	plural
PTC	particle
PPOS	postposition
PX	possessive suffix
REL	relativizer
SG	singular